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PREFACE

This reconstruction of Gros Ventre life as it had been lived before the disappearance of the buffalo around 1884 is the result of a joint undertaking. When the late Dr. John M. Cooper visited the Fort Belknap Reservation in 1938, he met there a group of older men who were interested in having him cooperate with them in the making of a record of their "old way of life." The project was then undertaken and continued by Dr. Cooper in the summers of 1939 and 1940. It was upon the invitation of the Gros Ventres that I went to the Reservation in 1940 to work with the women and to deal mainly with matters other than the religious aspects of their culture. Pressure of other duties, combined with ill-health, prevented Dr. Cooper's return to the field after 1940, but the taking of the record was subsequently continued by me in the summers of 1945 and 1948.

The results are presented in two parts, Part I on Social Life is the more general, giving a background for Part II which deals exclusively with Religion. The writing of Part II had been practically completed by Dr. Cooper at the time of his death in 1949; it will appear as a separate volume under his name.

It is my privilege to thank all of the Gros Ventres who cooperated in the taking of the record. In 1945 and in 1948 preliminary drafts of the material were checked and revised in the field. In spite of all precautions it is not unlikely that some errors may remain. For these the Gros Ventres themselves are in no way responsible. The onus, especially for any misrepresentation of the Gros Ventre point of view, must rest entirely on us.

While Dr. Cooper financed his own field work, I am indebted to the Charles and Grace E. Lastner Fund for part of my field expense in 1940 and in 1945, and to the Research Fund of The Catholic University of America, for the grant which enabled me to return to the Fort Belknap Reservation for the summer of 1948.

To the School Sisters of St. Francis, who at no small inconvenience to themselves accommodated my husband and me at St. Paul's School, we are deeply grateful. We wish likewise to

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114 Although the Gros Ventres are mentioned with sufficient frequency in the late eighteenth and in the nineteenth century sources to enable us to trace some of their movements and history, information on their culture is disappointingly meager. There is nothing in the sources on the Gros Ventres, for instance, that is in any way comparable with the richness of Thompson's account of the Piegan. The only real knowledge we have had of Gros Ventre culture is from the pioneer ethnological investigations of Professor Kroeber. In his Ethnology of the Gros Ventre, published in 1908, Dr. Kroeber deals with material culture and outlines the political, social and religious organization. He gives excellent illustrations of such objects pertaining to industries, to recreative, and to ceremonial life, as were still in the hands of the Gros Ventres at the turn of the century. He devotes considerable time to a detailed comparative treatment of decorative art, and in a separate paper deals with Gros Ventre Myths and Tales. Dr. Kroeber's major field work in 1900–03 was devoted to the Arapaho and in his monograph on this people he refers occasionally to his Gros Ventre data, especially, for instance, in the section on kinship terminology.

128 While the present ethnographical account deals primarily with Gros Ventre culture of the nineteenth century, as does Dr. Kroeber's Ethnology, the emphases are somewhat different. In Part I, for instance, we have found it possible to extend what Dr. Kroeber dealt with in several pages on social customs into a number of chapters dealing with aspects of the life cycle and kinship behavior. We have attempted to inject a chronological aspect through our detailed treatment of Gros Ventre history, but our sections on political organization and on war lack the lengthy firsthand statements by individuals which makes Dr. Kroeber's account so valuable. In Part II, we have been able to add vastly more detail on religious life than that presented by Dr. Kroeber. In our material, the Flat and Feathered Pipe rites are emphasized as well as personal supernatural powers. Furthermore we have presented the versions as told by our informants of the tales and myths pertinent to a given area of religious life. Some of these show variations on those published by Dr. Kroeber, and some are new.

124 Dr. Cooper worked with the Gros Ventres in the summers of

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the discussion when some problem arose or additional information was needed.

The material as presented in Part I, Social Life, is somewhat uneven due in some measure at least to the coincidence of age and sex differences in our chief informants. The two women,—Coming Daylight and Singer,—who gave the bulk of the material on the life cycle, on kinship behavior and on economic activities, came of a generation earlier than that of The Boy, Thick and Charles Buckman who supplied most of the information on political structure and war. The old women were able to draw on their personal experiences of Gros Ventre life as it was lived before the buffalo disappeared. They themselves had been child-brides, had lived in polygynous households, had worked innumerable buffalo skins, and so on. The men, however, had not yet attained adult status when the most radical change was inaugurated in their culture and thus were denied participation in the former type of culture to the same degree as that enjoyed by the women. Men and women alike, nevertheless, were careful to separate what they knew at first hand from what they had been told. Further, they indicated from whom they had acquired information, and the men especially estimated as accurately as they could to what decade a given event which they were describing might be attributed.

Although a considerable amount of linguistic data was gathered and drawn upon, all but a few of the native words have been eliminated from Part I. We hope to present the linguistic material in the future when it may be possible to publish as Part III a transcription of music and texts of the songs which we have recorded. The phonograph records of the 130 Gros Ventre songs are on deposit in the Department of Anthropology of The Catholic University of America, along with the musical notation of songs nos. 1–10, 12–15, 17–19, 23–24, which have very kindly been transcribed by Mrs. Marianne Arden. Songs nos. 24, 34, 37, 42, 43, 65, 89, 91, and 130, have been transcribed and analyzed by Mr. Jack Kilpatrick under the title, The Possible Relationship of Content to Form in Certain Gros Ventres Songs, a dissertation for the degree Master of Music, July 1946, manuscript copies of which are on deposit at the Library of The Catholic University of America.

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PREFACE

This second part of the record of the "old way of life" of the Gros Ventres of Montana was written by Rt. Rev. John M. Cooper, late Professor and Head of the Department of Anthropology of The Catholic University of America. The manuscript had been all but completed by him at the time of his death in 1949. Dr. Cooper had intended to incorporate changes that might be suggested in view of my 1948 field check-up of the contents of the volume and then to critically edit the manuscript,—as only he could have done. I have thought it best to publish the manuscript essentially as Dr. Cooper had written it and to give additional information, obtained in 1948 and subsequently, in footnotes identified as my own. I have also added the cross-references to The Gros Ventres of Montana: Part I, Social Life, which appeared in 1953 and which was intended as a background for the present volume.

The general plan of the joint undertaking by Dr. Cooper and myself, and the procedure followed by us, have been outlined in the Preface and the Introduction to Part I, Social Life. Data on the principal informants have been given in the A[redacted] volume. These will not be repeated. We [redacted] with profound regret that Thomas Main [redacted] 52, and that The Boy died in January [redacted]

The Boy, a man of distinct p[redacted] of mind, as mentioned several times by Dr. Coop[redacted] the present volume, is responsible for the greater part of the material on ritual and ceremonial aspects of Gros Ventre life. The Boy, to a greater degree than his contemporaries, had been interested in ritual and its meaning since his early youth. From his father, Lame Bull, a keeper of the sacred Flat Pipe and an outstanding man, The Boy had acquired a rich store of knowledge which his enquiring mind enlarged in adult life. He was constantly discussing the past of his people with many other men, older than himself, who had participated more fully than was possible for him to do in the Gros Ventre way of life before the disappearance of the buffalo in 1887.

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CHAPTER I

SUPERNATURAL BEINGS

Before beginning our description of Gros Ventre ritual observances, it seems desirable, in the interests of order and clarity, to give some account one by one of the various Gros Ventre supernatural beings. These beings may be divided for our purposes into three categories: first, those to whom cult in the form of prayer or sacrifice was offered; second, those to whom no cult proper is offered but who enter in one form or another into ritual or who are conceived as actually helpful or harmful to the living Gros Ventres of modern times; third, those to whom no cult is rendered, who do not enter into ritual at all, and who, while conceived as helpful or harmful to the Gros Ventres at some time in the remoter or archaic past, are not so and have not been so in more recent or modern times. Beings of our third category belong rather to the realm of folklore or traditional history than to that of religion and will be given only passing attention here.

The chief beings of our first category are: the Supreme Being, the storm being, the sun, the earth, the Four Holy Men, Broken Knife, He-who-starved-to-death, the Last Child, the water monster(s), Little Spirit, He-who-dreams-of-Bha'a, the ghost helpers, the beings who gave power, the petroglyph beings. We shall now take these up in order, giving for each their names, nature, attributes and functions. The rites connected with them will be described in later chapters.

The Supreme Being

The most common name by which the Supreme Being was called or addressed was Ixtciboni:hohat (Above Ni:hohat).[1] The

[1] Cf. Kroeber, 1908, p. 275. In our transcription, a, e, i, o, u, have continental values: ä is flat as in English "bat"; ë is close to French "feu"; vowels are lengthened by a colon, as a:; ə is the unstressed indeterminate vowel; θ is th as in English "thing"; tc is a single sound as ch in English "church"; tc' is the same sound but glottalized and occurs only terminally; apostrophe indicates glottal stop.

APPENDIX

The following myths, tales, and traditions are given as told us mostly by The Boy, who in turn learned them in large part from his father. Variants from other informants are noted in passing and reference is made to Kroeber's earlier and more complete collection where appropriate.

1. Ni:hohat Liberates the Bladder People[1]

White Man started out and wandered around. At last he saw a single lodge and went over to it and entered. A man and woman were sitting there. They welcomed White Man and told him to sit down. Right away White Man thought: "I am tired and hungry. But they have nothing to eat." He wondered what to do next. The man said to the woman: "My friend has caught me unawares. He is hungry and tired and I have no food to give him." So the man called out: "My children, go and hunt so that we may eat and our guest may eat." This was good news to White Man. So he waited. It was now night. During the night something was bringing meat. You could hear something laying down meat outside. White Man thought this queer that meat should be brought at night instead of in the day time, but he just waited. After a while something stopped bringing these things to eat. The man then said to the woman: "Go out and fetch these things to eat so we and our guest can eat." So she went out and brought in all sorts of meat. So they ate liver, kidneys, tripe, and manifolds, eating them raw. There was plenty to eat so they ate and ate until they were full.

White Man began to wonder how all this was done. He had it on the tip of his tongue to ask but he didn't do so as this would have been impolite. So after a while he was so full that he fell asleep.

White Man woke up the next day and spent the day with the couple. When night came the man gave the same order in a loud voice: "My children, go and hunt and bring things to eat so that our guest may eat." Then this second night the same thing happened as on the night before.

This time White Man, after he had eaten until he was filled, made up his mind to ask the man how it was all done: "How do they get these good things to eat? Who are your children? I haven't seen any of them." The man replied: "Do you really want to know?" White Man answered: "Yes." The man said to him: "All right. Come with me to this rising ground here. I will show you." As they left the man's lodge he said: "Look up and you

[1] For explanation of the term "White Man" as used for the trickster, see p. 2. This story does not appear in Kroeber's collection.

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796 dance.[3] Wissler was well aware of the importance of the Grass
114 dance in the transition period of Plains culture from the old to the new, and suggested further studies be made. Nevertheless, no one has given us a close-up, so far as I know, of its dynamic aspects in the life of any one of the tribes who shared the phenomenon.

796 In 1901 Kroeber noted that the Grass dance as then performed
114 by the Gros Ventres differed considerably in form from that
177 which was described to him as having been the case when it was first adopted. He gives us a brief description of the earlier procedure, but naturally enough no details regarding the then current method of carrying out the Grass dance, since his concern was with the older tribal culture. He merely states: "It is no longer a young man's dance, nor confined to a certain group. All the people in the tribe take part in it. It is very similar in character to the present-day Arapaho crow-dance, as well as in the place it occupies in the life of the people. Among the Gros Ventre it is now the only dance held."[4] Our data, gathered during two visits to the Fort Belknap Reservation in 1940 and 1945, confirm Kroeber's and supplement them to a considerable extent.

121 In treating of the Grass dance then, we shall distinguish be-
128 tween an earlier period extending from between 1875 to 1880 up to about 1890, and a later period comprising the years from roughly 1890 to 1916. We shall first describe the form of the Grass dance as it was in the earlier period, then the changes which were later introduced, and finally we shall discuss the varying functions during both periods.

The Form: Earlier Period

796 According to Wissler the dance originated with the Dakota
177 about 1860 and is traceable as a development of the older Pawnee
171

[3] These specimens are in the American Museum of Natural History. Some of those used in the Gros Ventre Grass dance have been described by Kroeber, loc. cit.: fork, pp. 270–71; spoon, p. 271; whip, p. 271; crow-belt, pp. 271–72.

[4] Kroeber, loc. cit., p. 238.